

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 15, 2004

Content Analysis Team
Roadless State Petitions
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 221090
Salt Lake City, UT 84122

ATT: Forest Service Chief Bosworth

Dear Chief Bosworth:

We are concerned about the Administration's proposal to repeal the widely popular Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Rule). This proposal goes against the wishes of the 2.5 million public comments the Forest Service has received in support of the Rule -- including more than 140,000 Californians -- of which 97 percent were in support of the Rule.

The Rule is a balanced policy that protects the last third of our National Forests from development, which can increase fire risk, degrade water quality and threaten important salmon and steelhead streams. In California, these special lands represent twenty percent of California's National Forests. Yet, the Rule is incredibly important because it ensures that our National Forests will continue to provide clean drinking water for millions of Americans and Californians, wildlife habitat, spawning habitat for salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon fisheries, endless recreational opportunities, and other important ecological and economic values.

The Rule is also fiscally responsible as it allows the Forest Service to address the estimated \$10 billion backlog in needed road maintenance, instead of using taxpayer dollars to subsidize building new roads. In California alone, there are more than 44,000 miles of classified roads on National Forests -- this is nearly three times the amount of highways CalTrans manages. Much of this road system is in disrepair, causes significant harm to anadromous fish with collapsing culverts, and has more than a \$1 billion maintenance backlog.

Given the many important values of the Rule and the wide support it enjoys, we oppose the Administration's proposal to replace it with a process that requires Governors to petition for protections for roadless areas in their states with no guarantee that the protection will be accepted or enforced by the Forest Service. Decisions about land use and land protection within the National Forests are paid with federal tax dollars and are the job of the federal government. It is not the job of Governors who often do not have the staff, funding, expertise, or on-the-ground knowledge to make such land management decisions that do not fall under their jurisdiction. Moreover, the Administration's proposal essentially allows Governors veto power to eliminate

roadless protections in favor of increased logging, mining, or other development on federal lands by reverting to local forest management plans should a petition to seek protection not be filed.

We are also concerned that the Department appears to be using lawsuits against the Rule as an excuse for repealing it. The Department of Agriculture is not required by the pending litigation to act on the Rule. If anything, the Department of Justice should have offered a more vigorous defense of the Rule, as Attorney General Ashcroft indicated he would do during his confirmation hearings.

We urge the immediate withdrawal of the Administration's proposal to repeal the Roadless Rule. Present generations will thank you for protecting their drinking water, and future generations of Americans will thank you for preserving our last wild forests.

We appreciate your attention to our comments.

Sincerely,

Joe Lantos
Tom Lantos

Jane Harman
Maxine Waters

George Miller
Ken A. Waxman

Michael Mikulski

Grace E. Upton

Mike Thompson
B. G. Filner

Nancy Pelosi
Luille Rygal-Alford
Howard L. Berman
Hilda L. Solis

Barbara Lee

Summit on the Roadless

Sam Farr

Louella Sanchez

Lois Capra

Linda J. Sams

Ann B. Schiff

Luan A. Davis

Lynn Woolsey

Janice

Ellen Tauscher

Shoo